

["Bones"]

Words 1110

"Bones"

"Bones", pioneer Negro bronco-buster of the Panhandle, has given 275 white flowers to relatives of old-timers who have crossed the Last Frontier. He has presented many others to those who have done something outstandingly "white". Among those who have received this "[guardon?] of honor" are the president of the United States Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Postmaster General James Farley, Governor James V. Allred of Texas, Governor Clyde Tingley of New Mexico and [Ruth?] Bryan [Owen?].

May 6, 1940, marked the forty-sixth year since he began the custom. At the time he was working on the Clayton ranch in the Pacos region, breaking, training and [racing?] horses with young Tom Clayton, to whom he became very much devoted. When Tom was injured in a fall from a horse, the colored youth gathered a bunch of white wild flowers to give to his young employer, thinking that they would remind him of the range that he loved. When he was informed that young Clayton was dead, the heartbroken Negro gave the flowers to Tom's mother with the request that they be placed upon his grave.

Bones was born November 3, 1867, at Orangeville in Robinson County, Texas, the son of [Eleck?], an ex-slave who bore the surname of his former master, and Annie Hooks. Christened Matthew, he received the nickname, Bones, when he was ten years old.

At that tender age he left his home to drive Buck and [Berry?], oxen that drew the chuck wagon, for Steve Donald to the latter's ranch near Lewisville in Denton County. Here he often watched the cowboys play dice in their leisure moments. Once, when they laid the dice down, the Negro boy, intrigued with the "galloping cubes", picked them up to examine them more closely—and perhaps to experiment with them. When the cowboys again

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started their play, one of them yelled, Where's them bones? I'll bet that nigger's got'em". Thinking that he was being called "Bones", the boy vigorously protested, "My name ain't Bones". By overwhelming majority the cow hands proved that his name was Bones, and Bones he became from that moment. 2 Bones

Bones learned to read and write from Bob, young brother of Steve Donald. At night he studied the lessons that the white boy was privileged to learn in the schoolroom.

As young Bones grew to manhood, he learned, also, that, no matter how [expert?] he might be in any work, he was barred from certain positions by his color. Picking out an occupation in which he thought that there would not be so much competition with white men, he became a "bronco-buster". At the age of fifteen he was an expert at breaking the wildest horses. In later years he broke horses for the JA, Rowe and many other large ranches in the Panhandle, to which he came "when he was [grown?]".

Bones is perhaps the only person for whom a train has waited while he rode a horse. When his bronco-busting days were over, he became a railway porter. One day when the Santa Fe train upon which he made his run stopped at [Tampa?], it remained long enough for him to ride an outlaw horse that no one else had been able to "top".

When he was thirty-five, Bones left the plains to go to East Texas and bring back Indiana Crenshaw as his wife. A short time later, Adeline Grundy, a friend who came to the Panhandle with her, was killed by a random shot fired from the guns of drunken cowboys, as they passed the honeymoon cabin of Bones and his bride, to scare the Negroes, who as a race were not welcome in the region at that time.

When his first wife died after a happy married life of twenty-one years, Bones "tried one of them new models, but it didn't work". When he left the second wife, he gave as alimony his equity in a business building that he was "paying out".

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Although Bones has not accumulated much of this world's goods for himself, he has been instrumental in obtaining various things, material and immaterial, for others of his race in Amarillo. Through his efforts North Heights, exclusive Negro addition to the city, was established in 1926.

In the Heights is located Bones Park, named in honor of the pioneer Negro. In the park the base of native stone is all that has been completed of an equestrian statue planned as a tribute to the champion bronco-buster. 3 Although Bones, the son of a preacher, belongs to no church, he was instrumental in establishing the first Negro church in Amarillo and the Panhandle. He also helped to erect the first school for colored children in the city.

Bones, who never had any "schooling", is a great believer in education. One of a family of eight children, he helped to educate his three sisters and four brothers, one of whom became a doctor.

Although he never had a child of his own, Bones takes a keen interest in the colored boys and girls of his city, over whom he has a great influence for good. For years he was in charge of the Dogie Club, among whose members crime was practically unknown.

At the 1940 convention of Negroes in Detroit, at which seventy-five years of history and development of the colored race in America was celebrated, Bones was present with pictures and oral and written records of his people in the Panhandle, both black and white, with whom he had lived the history of fifty of those seventy-five years.

Old-timers and other white people of the region have grown to know and respect the aged Negro, whose heart is as white as their own. No pioneer gathering is complete without Bones and his white flower for the oldest settler present. "The White Carnation", composed by Mrs. John Arnold and Sylvester Cross of Silverton, was written in honor of his quaint custom.

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Bones has a fund of homely wisdom and philosophy, which, as he says, comes from experience. Although he is a member of no church, he has a religion of work and service for his fellowmen. Knowing that Negroes in America do not have the privileges and advantages of the white people, he yet deploras the attitude of many of the modern generation of colored boys and girls. Freedom, he says, is in the heart. Bones is well informed on the topic of the day, but his favorite subject is the history of the Panhandle and those who made that history, the pioneers, of whom he is proud to say that he is one.